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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PORT LOUIS 000366

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TAGS: PGOV PREL MP

SUBJECT: CHARGE'S QUARTERLY CALL ON MAURITIAN PRIME
MINISTER RAMGOOLAM

REF: PORT LOUIS 066

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Virginia M. Blaser for reasons 1.4 (b
and d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On November 11, Charge d'Affaires (CDA) enjoyed a cordial one and a half hour meeting with Mauritian Prime Minister Ramgoolam to discuss a variety of issues, including the PM's position on counter-piracy cooperation, peacekeeping deployments, the pending Status of Forces Agreement between the US and the GOM, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and Madagascar, lagging administrative and diplomatic reciprocity issues, and the overall US/Mauritius bilateral relationship. Charge noted that long-standing, unresolved issues between the two countries did not appear to properly represent the positive relations we shared. The PM concurred and agreed to move forward with more positive action on our requests, and to insist his ministers do the same. END SUMMARY.

THE PM OPENS WITH IRE ABOUT CHAGOS

¶2. (C) After opening pleasantries, PM Ramgoolam started the meeting voicing his frustration over the UK handling of the announcement regarding the proposed Marine Protected Area in the Chagos Archipelago. The PM said that his government had been given very little time to review the proposed announcement and plan, noting that the first news he had was a phone call from British Foreign Secretary David Miliband a few days prior. The PM had to drop a number of high priority issues (such as review of the upcoming GOM budget) to quickly review the proposal and make a few adjustments. Although he was pleased that HMG accepted input and changes made by the GOM, he felt inappropriately rushed. Ramgoolam speculated that the idea of the Marine Protected Area was one that Miliband was pushing either for UK election purposes or, more likely in the PM's view, to place Miliband in a strong position to leverage for a senior EU spot. The PM finished by saying that the GOM does not support this plan or the way it has been rolled out.

THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

¶3. (C) In preparation for the incoming Ambassador, CDA noted, she had spent a good bit of time reviewing our "record" with Mauritius, and had been surprised by how many issues remain outstanding and/or were resolved without agreement between the US and Mauritius. The relationship between the two countries is positive and strong, which is why having long-standing, unresolved issues on the table seems to undermine the true spirit of the bilateral relationship our two countries enjoy, she explained. The PM

invited CDA to provide examples of such issues, and the two discussed positive ways forward on points raised below.

COUNTER-PIRACY COOPERATION

14. (C) CDA asked the PM for his thoughts on the role his country could or would play regarding counter-piracy efforts in the Indian Ocean region. The PM noted his country's reluctance to get involved in piracy trials, and specifically noted that the MFA and State Law Office were disinclined to support any GOM involvement at this time. CDA pointed out that many meetings among a variety of partners, to include the UK, French, EU, and UNODC, with his government had taken place over the past several months. Stakeholders felt that at this stage it would be useful for the Prime Minister to hear directly from the UNODC on the issue of counter-piracy cooperation and, more specifically, the manner in which piracy trials and infrastructure support for such trials could be supported via the UN. The PM agreed to meet with UNODC representatives the first week in December. (NOTE: CDA subsequently spoke to the UKHC, who noted that while the French Ambassador as sitting EU chair would be best placed to arrange that meeting, the French Ambassador declined to do so until he had "specific orders" from Brussels. In light of this unwillingness, the UK agreed to take the lead to set up the UNODC briefing on point.)

RECOGNITION OF KOSOVO

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15. (C) CDA noted that the message the USG received from the GOM on Kosovo recognition has been very mixed, from an outright "no" delivered repeatedly by the MFA to the unsolicited June 2009 phone call to CDA from the PM in which he said he would recognize Kosovo in July despite his MFA's strong urgings to the contrary. After the PM's statement that he would trump the MFA decision, no recognition announcement was ever made, and CDA wondered about GOM's current plans. The PM acknowledged his call and decision to recognize Kosovo, but said action by him then was delayed due to extreme pressure put on him by the MFA career diplomats (such as Secretary of Foreign Affairs Neewoor) who strongly feel that recognizing Kosovo undermines the GOM position on the Chagos Archipelago. CDA requested the PM to reconsider the GOM's position on recognition of Kosovo.

STATUS OF FORCES AGREEMENT

16. (C) The GOM has had a draft SOFA for review for over a year, the CDA noted. Based on earlier discussions among visiting Africa Command General Kip Ward, the PM, and the CDA, it had been the USG's impression that the GOM was interested in pursuing a SOFA with the United States. Subsequent to that meeting, however, a number of diplomatic notes from the MFA indicated a hardline unwillingness even to discuss a SOFA. CDA remarked upon what appeared again to be a reversal of the GOM stance on such an agreement. The PM said that he supported positive discussions toward a SOFA and that he would speak to the Foreign Minister to ensure that the GOM tone and stance on discussions changed immediately. (NOTE: In a meeting the following day between CDA and the ForMin, the ForMin noted he had received a call from the PM who told him to change "the impression the USG has on such points." The ForMin scheduled a meeting the following week with all SOFA stakeholders with the idea of opening up more pleasant and productive discussions with the US on that point. More SEPTEL.) CDA thanked the PM for being willing to open up discussions again and for his personal support of US military activities in Mauritius and the region.

POLICE PEACEKEEPERS

¶7. (C) The PM and CDA discussed ways in which Mauritius can demonstrate leadership in the region, and agreed that the long awaited Mauritian police peacekeepers are a positive step in this direction. CDA asked for an update on where and when Mauritians would contribute in this fashion, noting that it had been some months since the Embassy received information that the peacekeepers were "a go." The PM expressed surprise that nothing had been done since that time, and agreed to follow up with his security and police leadership to press them for final decisions on the deployment.

AGOA AND MADAGASCAR

¶8. (C) With regard to the Mauritian position on Madagascar's possible loss of AGOA entitlement, CDA noted that the USG had not officially heard from the GOM on its position. She urged the PM to ensure that the GOM voice was heard in the review of AGOA. Subsequent to the meeting with the PM, the Embassy received a diplomatic note and letter from the Foreign Minister to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce which pushed for U.S. continuation of AGOA for Madagascar. The letter underscores the GOM alignment with the AU position on the need to restore "constitutional legality" in Madagascar, adding that the loss of AGOA eligibility for Madagascar would undermine efforts at reconciliation. Furthermore, investment from Mauritius in the Malagasy textile and apparel section comes to circa \$27.3 million and Mauritian companies in Madagascar employ 8,000 workers there. (NOTE: Full note to be forwarded to AF/EX septel. END NOTE.)

DIPLOMATIC RECIPROCITY

¶9. (SBU) Finally, CDA raised the long-standing issue of diplomatic reciprocity, noting that despite regulations in the Vienna Convention, bilateral agreements with the USG (such as on work permits for spouses), and GOM regulations

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and handbooks which actively underscore GOM intentions to support foreign missions based on reciprocity, the GOM falls well short of its support to the US Embassy in Port Louis compared to the reverse in Washington. From spousal employment, to paying taxes on purchases and utilities, to de facto high car duties and taxes for imported vehicles, the spirit and fact of reciprocity are not being sustained. CDA asked for the PM's support in multi-ministry review of policies which undermine reciprocity for US diplomats in Mauritius. As this issue is first the role of the protocol office at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the PM said he would speak to the ForMin to ask for quick action on responding to these reciprocity problems. Such a lack of support is not, he said, the message he wants the U.S. receiving from his government. (NOTE: During CDA's subsequent meeting with the ForMin the next day, he agreed to arrange a multi-ministry meeting to resolve outstanding problems for the Mission. The meeting date, however, has not yet been set. END NOTE.)

DELIBERATE UNDERMINING BY MFA?

¶10. (C) Never overly foreign affairs focused, the PM is even more in "internal affairs" mode due to the upcoming budget announcement and pre-election maneuvering in advance of the likely Spring 2010 election. Even so, the PM appeared

genuinely uncomfortable that his government hasn't delivered on a good number of bilateral requests from the USG. He blamed, in large part, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and particularly the "career diplomats" there who, he alleges, may be attempting to deliberately undermine the US/Mauritius relationship in order to make the PM "look bad prior to the elections." He told CDA that he believed many of them would be "standing with the opposition" during the upcoming elections.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) Post relations with the PM and key ministers -- including the Foreign Minister -- are positive. Of all the ministries with whom we work, however, the MFA tends to be the most difficult and least supportive of US requests at the below-minister level. Unfortunately, this means that to move a position or even receive a hearing on a position (i.e. in the UN or other political issues such as Zimbabwe), Post must gain the direct support of the PM. Without active support from the PM, much simply does not get decided, or is not decided in our favor. Because of this, Post will continue to push for regular meetings between the PM and COM, above and beyond courtesy calls and VIP events. To the best of our knowledge, the US Embassy is the only mission here to organize such quarterly meetings with the PM.

BLASER